

PARENTS AND CHILDREN.

A SEQUEL TO "HOME EDUCATION."

BY THE EDITOR.

"ATTENTION."

"But now for the real object of this letter (does it take your breath away to get four sheets?) We want you to help us about Kitty. My husband and I are at our wits' end, and should most thankfully take your wise head and kind heart into counsel. I fear we have been laying up trouble for ourselves and for our little girl. The ways of nature are, there is no denying it, very attractive in all young creatures, and it is so delightful to see a child do as 'tis its nature to, that you forget that Nature, left to herself, produces a waste, be it never so lovely. Our little Kitty's might so easily become a wasted life.

"But not to prose any more, let me tell you the history of Kitty's yesterday—one of her days is like the rest, and you will be able to see where we want your help.

"Figure to yourself the three little heads bent over 'copy-books' in our cheery schoolroom. Before a line is done, up starts Kitty.

"Oh, mother, may I write the next copy—s h e l l ? "Shell" is so much nicer than—k n o w, and I'm so tired of it."

"How much have you done?"

"I have written it three whole times, mother, and I really *can't* do it any more! I think I could do—s h e l l. "Shell" is so pretty!"

"By-and-by we read; but Kitty cannot read—can't even spell the words (don't scold us, we know it is quite wrong to spell in a reading lesson), because all the time her eyes are on a smutty sparrow on the topmost twig of the poplar; so she reads, 'W i t h, birdie!' We do sums; a short line of addition is to poor Kitty a hopeless and an endless task. 'Five and three make—nineteen,' is her last effort, though she knows quite well how to add up figures. Half a scale on the piano, and

then—eyes and ears for everybody's business but her own. Three stitches of hemming, and idle fingers plait up the hem or fold the duster in a dozen shapes. I am in the midst of a thrilling history talk: 'So the Black Prince——' 'Oh, mother, do you think we shall go to the sea this year? My pail is quite ready, all but the handle, but I can't find my spade *anywhere!*'

"And thus we go on, pulling Kitty through her lessons somehow; but it is a weariness to herself and all of us, and I doubt if the child learns anything except by bright flashes. But you have no notion how quick the little monkey is. After idling through a lesson she will overtake us at a bound at the last moment, and thus escape the wholesome shame of being shown up as the dunce of our little party.

"Kitty's dawdling ways, her restless desire for change of occupation, her always wandering thoughts, lead to a good deal of friction, and spoil our schoolroom party, which is a pity, for I want the children to enjoy their lessons from the very first. What do you think the child said to me yesterday in the most coaxing pretty way? 'There are so many things nicer than lessons! Don't you think so, mother?' Yes, dear aunt, I see you put your finger on those unlucky words 'coaxing, pretty ways,' and you look, if you do not say, that awful sentence of yours about sin being bred of allowance. Isn't that it? It is quite true; we are in fault. Those butterfly ways of Kitty's were delicious to behold until we thought it time to set her to work, and then we found that we should have been training her from her babyhood. Well,

'If you break your plaything yourself, dear,
Don't you cry for it all the same,
I don't think it is such a comfort
To have only oneself to blame.'

So, like a dear, kind aunt, don't scold us, but help us to do better. Is Kitty constant to anything? you ask. Does she stick to any of the '*many* things so much nicer than lessons'? I am afraid that here, too, our little girl is 'unstable as water.' And the worst of it is, she is all agog to be at a thing, and then, when you think her settled to half an hour's pleasant play, off she is like any butterfly. She says her, 'How doth the little busy bee,' dutifully, but when I tell her she is not a bit like a busy bee, but rather like a foolish, flitting butterfly, I'm afraid she rather likes it, and makes up to the butterflies as if they were

akin to her, and were having just the good time she would prefer. But you must come and see the child to understand how volatile she is.

"Oh, mother, *please* let me have a good doll's wash this afternoon; I'm quite unhappy about poor Peggy! I really think she *likes* to be dirty!"

"Great preparations follow in the way of little tub, and soap, and big apron; the little laundress sits down, greatly pleased with herself, to undress her dirty Peggy; but hardly is the second arm out of its sleeve, than, *presto!* a new idea; off goes Kitty to clean out her doll's-house, deaf to all nurse's remonstrances about 'nice hot water,' and 'poor dirty Peggy.'

"I'm afraid the child is no more constant to her loves than to her play; she is a loving little soul, as you know, and is always adoring somebody. Now it's her father, now Juno, now me, now Hugh; and the rain of warm kisses, the soft clasping arms, the nestling head, are delicious, whether to dog or man. But, alas! Kitty's blandishments are a whistle you must pay for; to-morrow it is somebody else's turn, and the bad part is that she has only room for one at a time. If we could get a little visit from you, now, Kitty would be in your pocket all day long; and we, even Peggy, would be left out in the cold. But do not flatter yourself it would last; I think none of Kitty's attachments has been known to last longer than two days.

"If the chief business of parents is to train *character* in their children, we have done nothing for Kitty; at six years old the child has no more power of application, no more habit of attention, is no more able to make herself do the thing she ought to do, indeed, has no more desire to do the right thing, than she had at six months old. We are getting very unhappy about it. My husband feels strongly that parents should labour at character as the Hindoo gold-beater labours at his vase; that *character* is the one thing we are called upon to effect. And what have we done for Kitty? We have turned out a 'fine animal,' and are glad and thankful for that; but that is all; the child is as wayward, as unsteady as a young colt. Do help us, dear aunt. Think our little girl's case over; if you can, get at the source of the mischief, and send us a few hints for our guidance, and we shall be yours gratefully evermore."

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"And now for my poor little great-niece! Her mother

piles up charges against her, but how interesting and amusing and like the free world of fairy-land it would all be were it not for the *tendencies* which, in these days, we talk much about and watch little against. We bring up our children in the easiest, happy-go-lucky way, and all the time talk solemnly in big words about the momentous importance of every influence brought to bear upon them. But it is true; these naughty, winsome ways of Kitty's will end in her growing up like half the 'girls'—that is, young women—one meets. They talk glibly on many subjects; but test them, and they know nothing of any; they are ready to undertake anything, but they carry nothing through. This week, So-and-so is their most particular friend, next week such another; even their amusements—their one real interest—fail and flag; but then there is some useful thing to be learnt—how to set tiles or play the banjo! And, all the time, there is no denying, as you say, that this very fickleness has a charm, so long as the glamour of youth lasts, and the wayward girl has bright smiles and winning, graceful ways to disarm you with. But youth does not last; and the poor lassie, who began as a butterfly, ends as a grub, tied to the earth by the duties she never learnt how to fulfil—that is, supposing she is a girl with a conscience; wanting that, she dances through life whatever befalls; children, husband, home, must take their chance. 'What a giddy old grandmother the Peterfields have!' remarked a pert young man of my acquaintance. But, indeed, the 'giddy old grandmother' is not an unknown quantity.

"Are you saying to yourself, a prosy old 'great-aunt' is as bad as a 'giddy old grandmother?' I really have prosed abominably, but Kitty has been on my mind all the time, and it is quite true you must take her in hand.

"First, as to her lessons: you *must* help her to gain the power of attention; that should have been done long ago, but better late than never, and an aunt who has given her mind to these matters takes blame to herself for not having seen the want sooner. 'But,' I fancy you are saying, 'if the child has no faculty of attention, how can we give it to her? It's just a natural defect.' Not a bit of it! Attention is not a faculty at all, though I believe it is worth more than all the so-called faculties put together; this, at any rate, is true, that no talent, no genius, is worth much without the power of attention; and

this is the power which makes men or women successful in life.

"Attention is no more than this—the power of giving your mind to what you are about—the bigger the better so far as the mind goes, and great minds do great things; but have you never known a person with a great mind—'real genius,' his friends say—who goes through life without accomplishing anything? It is just because he wants the power to 'turn on,' so to speak, the whole of his great mind; he is unable to bring the whole of his power to bear on the subject in hand. 'But Kitty?' Yes, Kitty must get this power of 'turning on.' She must be taught to give her mind to sums and reading, and even to dusters. Go slowly; a little to-day and a little more to-morrow. In the first place, her lessons must be made *interesting*. Do not let her scramble through a page of 'reading,' for instance, spelling every third word and then waiting to be told what it spells, but see that every day she learns a certain number of new words—six, twelve, twenty, as she is able to hear them; not 'spellings'—terrible invention!—but words that occur in a few lines of some book of stories or rhymes; and these she should know, not by spelling, but by *sight*. It does not matter whether the new words be long or short, in one syllable or in four, but let them be *interesting* words. For instance, suppose her task for to-day be 'Little Jack Horner,' she should learn to know, *by sight*, thumb, plum, Christmas, corner, &c., before she begins to read the rhyme; make 'plum' with her loose letters, print it on her slate, let her find it elsewhere in her book, any device you can think of, so that 'plum' is brought before her eyes half a dozen times, and each time recognised and named. Then, when it comes in the reading lesson, it is an old friend, read off with delight. Let every day bring the complete mastery of a few new words, as well as the keeping up of the old ones. At the rate of only six a day she will learn, say, fifteen hundred in a year; in other words, she will have learned to read! And if it do not prove to be reading without tears and reading with *attention*, I shall not presume to make another suggestion about the dear little girl's education.

"But do not let the lesson last more than ten minutes, and insist, with brisk, bright determination, on the child's full concentrated attention of eye and mind for the whole ten minutes. Do not allow a moment's dawdling at lessons.

"I would not give her rows of figures to add yet; use dominoes or the domino cards prepared for the purpose, the point being to add or subtract the dots on the two halves in a twinkling. You will find that the three can work together at this as at the reading, and the children will find it exciting and delightful as 'old soldier.' Kitty will be all alive here, and will take her share of work merrily; and this is a point gained. Do not, if you can help it, single the little maid out from the rest and throw her on her own responsibility. 'Tis a 'heavy and a weary weight' for the bravest of us, and the little back will get a trick of bending under life if you do not train her to carry it lightly, as an Eastern woman her pitcher.

"Then, vary the lessons; now head, and now hands; now tripping feet and tuneful tongue; but in every lesson let Kitty and the other two carry away the joyous sense of—

'Something attempted, something done.'

"Allow of no droning wearily over the old stale work which must be kept up all the time, it is true, but rather by way of an exciting game than as the lesson of the day, which should always be a distinct *step* that the children can recognise.

"You have no notion, until you try, how the 'now-or-never' feeling about a lesson quickens the attention of even the most volatile child; what you can drone through all day, you will; what *must* be done, is done. Then, there is a by-the-way gain besides that of quickened attention. I once heard a wise man say that, if he must choose between the two, he would rather his child should learn the meaning of 'must' than inherit a fortune. And here you will be able to bring moral force to bear on wayward Kitty. Every lesson must have its own time, and no other time in this world is there for it. The sense of the preciousness of time, of the irreparable loss when a ten minutes' lesson is thrown away, must be brought home.

"Let your own unaffected distress at the loss of 'golden minutes' be felt by the children, and also be visited upon them by the loss of some small childish pleasure which the day should have held. It is a sad thing to let a child dawdle through a day and be let off scot-free. You see, I am talking of the children, and not of Kitty alone, because it is so much

easier to be good in company; and what is good for her will be good for the trio.

"But there are other charges: poor Kitty is neither steady in play nor steadfast in love! May not the *habit* of attending to her lessons help her to stick to her play? Then, encourage her. 'What! The doll's tea-party over! That's not the way grown-up ladies have tea; they sit and talk for a long time. See if you can make your tea-party last twenty minutes by my watch!' This failing of Kitty's is just a case where a little gentle ridicule might do a great deal of good. It is a weapon to be handled warily, for one child may resent, and another take pleasure in being laughed at; but managed with tact I do believe it's good for children and grown-ups to see the comic side of their doings.

"I think we err in not enough holding up certain virtues for our children's admiration. Put a premium of praise on every finished thing, if it is only a house of cards. Steadiness in work is a step on the way towards steadfastness in love. Here, too, the praise of constancy might very well go with good-humoured family 'chaff,' not about the new loves which are lawful, whether of kitten or playmate, but about the discarded old loves. Let Kitty and all of them grow up to glory in their constancy to every friend.

"There, I am sending you a notable preachment instead of the few delicate hints I meant to offer; but never mount a woman on her hobby—who knows when she will get off again?"

BOOKS.

"En hoexkens ende boexkens."

Holy Gladness. Words by Edward Oxenford, music by Sir John Stainer. Sir John Stainer's name speaks for the tunes; illustrations very lovely; an exquisite gift book for the little ones. Words and thoughts and pictures and tunes pointing the children gently heavenwards.

"Thou, O Lord, hast stood beside us
Through the darkness of the night"

is framed in a wreath of passion-flowers, and faces two sweet maidens singing their morning hymn, the warm young life in their complexions and garments showing out against the darkness of the organ. (Griffith, Farran, and Co.)

Hearts and Voices. Songs of the Better Land. Another quite delightful treasure for the little ones. Sunday book, we were going to say, but only because Sunday should have the *best* books. Here we have the very sweetest of the children's hymns: "My God who makes the sun to know," "I think when I read," "A little ship was on the sea," "We are but little children weak," "There's a Friend for little children," "Once in royal David's city," "Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber," "Now the day is over," in large and lovely type, with head-pieces and tail-pieces, angels, flowers, children, exquisite coloured illustrations, real works of art, facing each hymn. A little boy and girl with holy-child faces watching a "little ship" sailing on a blue summer sea, and plainly talking, as they watch, of the little ship in their morning's hymn. (Griffith, Farran, and Co.)

The Next Thing Series (Griffith, Farran, and Co.). A series of capital little books, six at sixpence each and six at threepence each, some of them written with a good deal of literary power and all with a good deal of practical purpose. In the dearth of any attempt to teach homely everyday morals, we must give a hearty welcome to these little books, where the moral is so well carried in the story that you think it all jam and no powder. The tales are for the most part of cottage life or servant life; but the reader is not offended by a *de haut en bas* tone; they are not written to teach the reader how to behave to her betters, but how to behave to her own sweetheart or sister or mother; in every case the characters are natural, the tale is natural, and the moral is not weighted with goody-goody sentiment. *Shoulder to Shoulder*, by Lanoe Falconer, is, as its second title states, a tale of love and friendship, and very pleasing and wholesome reading it is. *A Golden Silence*, by Mrs. Powell, introduces you to a really pleasant acquaintance in Leonora Baines, who gives up a post as parlourmaid because she finds she has been unwise in repeating table-talk, but know